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every night during its first two weeks of life, a group comprising mostly young people is assembled in the room with the mother and pass the nights in games, dancing and music. These nightly vigils have a special name in Georgian, *hamis theva,* meaning "watch night."

The Georgians of Guria[29] also observe the custom of *hamis theva,* but only for one night, either one week or two weeks after the child is born.

The Georgians of Megrelia also have the custom of observing the night watch, which is called in their language *serish takhua,* meaning "vigilant night." Literally the Megrelian expression, *serish takhua,* means in English, "breaking of a night," from the Megrelian words, *seri* (night) and the verb, *takhua* (to break).

Besides the Georgians, the same custom of night watch is observed by other peoples of the Caucasus. For example, the Karachais[30] regard the first seven days after the birth of the child as the most dangerous, and in order to protect the child from the attack of evil spirits the young girls are assembled in the room with the mother and baby, and pass the time in games while watching the child. The seventh night is regarded by them as the most dangerous and has the special name, *stim keche* or *bastiri klangan,* which means "the night of nightmare."

Among the Talish, on the sixth day after the birth of the child, to protect it from the attack of the evil spirit called *Shasha,* the relatives and friends of the family keep the watch-night. They keep the light the whole night through in the room where the baby is, and place a fish net over the crib. In case they fall asleep, they place bread and milk at the entrance of the room, on the porch, so that, as they think, *Shasha* will eat it and will not touch the child.

Besides watching the mother and child against possible attack by the evil spirits, the people resort for protection to the magical powers of different objects. Among them the most important in the Caucasus is plain iron, or such objects as daggers, sabres, sickles, axes, awls, knives (especially with black handles), etc.

[29] Mamaladze: 155.
[30] Chursin: e, 28.

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Besides iron objects, other things frequently used for magical purposes are charcoal, rope in imitation of a snake, red thread, and fish net; and it may be added that they believe in the protective and cleansing power of fire.

However, of all the objects used for magical purposes, the people in the Caucasus regard iron as the most important.

So the Khevsur woman[31] expecting a child must have under her pillow, especially for the occasion, a sabre called in Georgian *kajistmiani khmali*, which represents a sabre with the allegorical picture of the evil spirit.

The Pshavs,[32] neighbors of the Khevsurs, give to the woman in childbed a dagger and a pig's tooth as protection against the evil spirit called *matsuli*. The Pshavs believe that the evil spirit is afraid of the pig's tooth and dagger, and will leave the woman and babe undisturbed.

Among the Georgian mountaineers of Karthli the woman preparing herself for delivery places around her bed such iron things as an awl, a sickle, an axe, a knife with a black handle, and other iron objects.

The Georgians of the Thelav district, department of Tiflis, in order to keep a child quiet and safely protected from evil spirits, put into the child's crib such pieces of iron because they believe the evil spirit will avoid them.

The same Georgians,[33] when carrying a child on a night trip, consider it necessary to protect it from evil spirits by putting a knife and a piece of charcoal in its bed-linen, because the people think that evil spirits are afraid of these things. And for the protection of the mother from the evil spirits, they put a dagger or sabre under her pillow. It is also interesting to note the custom of the same group of Georgians to lighten the sufferings of women in travail. If a woman is in travail, her husband must bring water in the skirt of his hand and give a drink to her. Or sometimes they invite a man who has chanced to set free a frog from the mouth of a snake. He approaches the suffering woman and,

[31] Bardavelidze-Lomia: 238.
[32] Khizanashvili: 138.
[33] Stepanov: 63, 81.

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giving her water to drink, says: "Child, separate from the mother, as I have separated the frog from the snake!"

In this last-mentioned custom we have the belief in the magical power of the action of separation with the same object of helping the woman in travail and speeding the delivery as is used in other actions, such as opening, division, unlocking, emptying, etc.

The Georgians of Imerethi,[34] in order to protect the child from the evil spirits, put in its cradle, under the pillow, a knife with a black handle, and charcoal. Many pregnant women carry a knife with them during the day, and at night keep them under their pillows—for the purpose of keeping the evil spirits and their dangerous influence away from them.

Among the Georgians of the province of Ratcha[35] the woman delivers her child in a separate room. She is put, not on a bed, but on straw which is spread on the floor. And as the woman is very weak by this time, they believe that the evil spirit may easily seize her *sheipkros,* as they say in Georgian. To avoid this danger, they put under her pillow the holy image of the Virgin Mary and a dagger, as in their opinion the two-edged dagger is the only weapon of which the evil spirit is afraid.

In this case we have the usual mixture in the Caucasus of the old primitive beliefs with Christianity. The image of the Virgin Mary is endowed with the same magical power of protection from evil spirits as a piece of iron—the dagger.

The belief in the magical power of a dagger (iron) is clearly manifested in the customs of the Pshavs,[36] observed during the marriage ceremony, when the brother of the bride, at the time of the procession around the house-hearth, strikes with his dagger the iron chain called *sakideli,* in order to keep the evil spirits away from the bride. The dagger is considered by the Pshavs, as we mentioned previously,[37] as a sacred object, *samkhtho sagania,* and drives evil spirits away.

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[34] Mashrko: 306.
[35] Japaridze: 138.
[36] Khizanashvili: 125.
[37] See Chapter VI on Marriage.